



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# A N T I Q U I T I E S.

---

*An Account of an antient INSCRIPTION in OGAM CHARACTER on the Sepulchral Monument of an IRISH CHIEF, discovered by THEOPHILUS O'FLANAGAN, Student of T. C. D. Communicated by the Rev. WILLIAM HAMILTON, F. T. C. D. Secretary to the Committee of Antiquities.*

---

PURSUANT to the request and directions of your academy, in the beginning of last autumn I went to the county of Clare, in order to conduct Edward William Burton, Esq; of Clifden in that county, to a monument of antiquity which I had the good fortune to discover five or six years before on a mountain, named Mount Callan : of this I had the honour to present a memorial to Colonel Vallancey in the year 1784 ; but as indeed I had not then a sufficient knowledge of the Ogam character to enable me to give a critical interpretation of the inscription, I beg leave now to offer to the Royal Academy the result of an attentive examination of it since that time.

Read December 19, 1785.

HAVING from my earliest days been pretty well acquainted with the several dialects of the Irish language, I took great

(A 2) pleasure

pleasure in reading many of the legends, written on the exploits of the Irish Fenii in prose, as well as those in verse ascribed to Ossian. In one of the latter I met the following passage, viz. “ The fierce and mighty Conan was not in the desperate  
 “ battle of Gabhra ; for in May, the preceding year, the daunt-  
 “ less hero was treacherously slain by the Fenii of Fin, at an  
 “ assembly met to worship the sun :—His sepulchral monument  
 “ was raised on the North West !—His wailing dirge was sung !  
 “ —And his name is inscribed in Ogam characters on a flat  
 “ stone on the very black mountain of Callan\* !”

BEING, at this time, pretty well acquainted with the alphabetical scale of the Ogam character, as it is given in Mc. Curtin’s grammar, but not having seen any thing written in it, I very much longed for an opportunity to try my skill in decyphering : To satisfy this desire, as well as to gratify my curiosity, I set off with a companion from Ennis to visit the monument so particularly specified by the poem ; Mount-Callan being only from eight to ten miles distant, North West, from the place of our departure.

WHEN we came within sight of the mountain my expectations were exceedingly raised, imagining I could soon feast my eyes

\* Ni raib an Laoch fraochda Conan, an Gabhra ’fan trean dail ;  
 Am Bealtaine an Bliadhain roimhe, aig Coine adhartha na Greine ;  
 Ro torchar an Curadh nar tim, a Fiongail le Fianaibh Fin !—  
 Ro cloidh a Feart thiar bo thuaigh ;—a Cluitne Caointe bo diol truaigh !—  
 ’Sta Ainim Ogam air lic blaith, i sliabh comh-dubh Callain.

*See the Poem, entitled The Battle of Gabhra.*

with

with the inscription. For, at the distance of about a mile North East from the high road leading from Ennis to Ibrican, I perceived (as I thought) a square rock, which bore the awful appearance of a monument, on the Leitirmoylan (that is, the South East) side of the mountain. I hastened my pace; but, on coming up to it, how much was I disappointed, finding it to be a large Druid altar, without the smallest traces of any characters appearing thereon!

NOTWITHSTANDING this disappointment, still I was determined to persevere, and traversed a long range of the mountain to no purpose. At length applying to a cottager hard by, I asked him whether he knew of any other stone on the mountain besides the altar, which bore any resemblance to a monument, or that appeared to have an inscription on it? He told me that he observed one not unlike a tomb-stone, having strokes engraved thereon very unlike letters, at the side of a small lake, about a mile North East of the altar. To this, at my request, he directed me; and on my arrival there, all my anxiety was done away by a successful discovery of the wished-for monument.

I HAD taken no grammar with me, and having the rules of decyphering but imperfectly in memory, I was not thoroughly well-prepared to collect the entire sense of the inscription. However, I made some attempt even then towards an interpretation, which did not materially differ from the first reading given in this paper, for the inscription admits of five, as I shall have occasion to shew hereafter. My explication was then, “ Beneath this  
“ stone

“ stone is Conan the fierce the long-legged\* ;” and the true reading is, “ Beneath this stone is laid Conan the fierce the nimble-footed †.”

HAVING thus fully gratified my curiosity, which alone was the purposed end of my journey at that time ; I returned home, well pleased with my success, and communicated it to my friends, to whom it afforded a few days conversation concerning antiquities, to my no small credit as the discoverer.

THIS credit, however, was soon after in much danger of being ruined, in consequence of the superstition and folly of the neighbouring peasants, who had very extraordinary traditions of Conan’s interment. For they held it as fact, that, on opening his grave, this wild inhospitable mountain would at once become a fertile plain—That a beautiful city, which they imagined lay enchanted in the lake, would be opened by a key which they said was buried with him—and that a great mass of golden treasure was also to be acquired. These enormous expectations were exceedingly raised on seeing strangers make such diligent search after this monument.

I HAD an alarming proof of the effects of these idle opinions in the late journey which I made to the mountain of Callan, at the instance of your Academy, in the beginning of Autumn 1785. For when Mr. Burton and I arrived at the spot where I had seen

\* Fan licfi ta Conan Colgac cos-fada.

† Fan li da fica Conan Colgac cos-obmda.

it before, I was thrown into the utmost consternation for some time, my object not appearing in view, when I was confident it should. This was occasioned by a contrivance of such of the peasants as had discovered it themselves, and by some means came to be apprised of my visit. For (in expectation of an opportunity to enrich themselves, or of being rewarded for shewing it) they had covered the stone all over with heath, the better to conceal it, and disappoint my search: However, as I well knew the particular spot, I was fortunate enough to baffle their concerted plan, and execute the purpose of my deputation, by shewing it to Mr. Burton, who made an accurate drawing of the stone, and transmitted the same to Colonel Vallancey.

As I imagined myself the first person led by curiosity to visit this monument, I congratulated myself much in the good fortune of the discovery; but Mr. Burton has informed me that a Mr. Barclay, who lived some time ago in that county, visited it from the same motive, being directed thereto by the papers of the late Michael Comyn, Esq; who lived in the neighbourhood of Mount Callan, and had made the discovery a good while before. I make no doubt but this is fact; for Mr. Comyn was celebrated for his knowledge of Irish antiquities. He made a translation of Keating, which he intended to publish, but death prevented the execution of his design, and the manuscript has been since fatally lost\*.

\* I have read an elegant romance of his composition in Irish, wherein he gives an account of most of the antiquities of the western part of the county of Clare; and in speaking of the before-mentioned altar, he says it was dedicated to the sun, and that the natives in heathen times assembled there on every 1st of May, which they kept a festival, to offer sacrifice to that deity.

THERE

THERE was indeed another gentleman in the county of Clare, a Mr. Lloyd, who published an account of that country, in which he made mention of Conan's monument on Mount-Callan; but as his explication of the inscription is exactly in the words of my first effort to that purpose, I am apt to believe it was from hearing what account I had given of it, rather than from any search or discovery of his own; for his publication appeared just about the time of my first visit to the monument.

AFTER Mr. Burton and I had returned from the mountain, having taken off the inscription very exactly, we endeavoured to decypher it according to the rules given in Colonel Vallancey's grammar for reading the Ogam character; and after we had gone through the entire process, I was not a little surprized to find it differed, in some measure, from what I held in memory since I formerly saw it. While I was still musing over it, Mr. Burton, calling to mind that the Phœnicians, from whom the Irish derived their origin, generally wrote from the right hand to the left, took the letters backward, that is, in a contrary direction from that in which we decyphered them; and after he had arranged them from left to right, not being conversant in the Irish language himself, asked me what sense would they make? I found no difficulty in answering his question, and by this means a second reading was found, which proved to be a continuation of the former sense. And thus it lay determined until my arrival in Dublin, where I had an opportunity of studying it still more, and soon found the advantage of so doing; for upon consulting the book of Ballimote, in the hands of Colonel Vallancey, I found there were different scales of the Ogam character, in each of which the number of similar lines, on whatever



ever side drawn, did not exceed five. Wherefore making myself as well acquainted with the scale as I possibly could, and again applying myself to the study of the inscription, I found it read the five different ways following, viz. 1st, " Beneath this sepulchral monument is laid Conan the fierce, the nimble-footed ;" 2d, " Obscure not the remains of Conan the fierce, the nimble-footed !" 3d, " Long let him lie at ease on the brink of this lake, beneath this hieroglyphic, darling of the Sacred !" 4th, " Long let him lie at ease on the brink of this lake, who never saw his faithful clan depressed !" 5th, " Hail, with reverential sorrow, the drooping heath around his lamentable tomb\* !" When all these various readings are united, there appears a rational beginning, continuation and conclusion of the same sense. But what is still farther remarkable, the number of readings is the limit of the number of lines in the Ogam scale. The whole is in the stile and manner of the antients, descriptive both of the man and the place ; and though the language be very antient, yet it is equally familiar and easy to such as are well versed in the several idioms and dialects of the Irish language.

THE first and second readings are found by twice decyphering the Ogam line in the inscription, from the broad to the narrow end of the stone (and here the process is from left to right) commuting the letters F and N, wherever they occur, as the sense shall direct ; and the third and fourth readings are found by taking the two former backwards (and here the pro-

\* First, " Fan li da fica Conan Colgac, cos-obmda !" 2d, " Na flida ni ca " Conan Colgac, cos-obmda !" 3d, Adm bo focc ag Loc fan oca cifa dil Naf !" 4th, " Adm bo focc ag Loc na foc a cina dil fan !" 5th, " Almho Coffag dos ta " cu os asit a lid cuat !"

cess is from right to left) commuting the letters F and N, as before. This commutability of the letters F and N depends on a circumstance peculiar to the Irish alphabet, it having two different arrangements; one of which begins with B, L, N, and is called Beithluifnuin, and the other with B, L, F, and called Beithluisfearn; the latter is peculiar to the Ogam system, but, when it is necessary for the construction, it does not totally reject the former, which was the alphabet in common use until Greek and Roman literature visited this country, and made the Irish arrange their alphabet, as far as it extended, conformable to their own. But the fifth and last reading is found by decyphering the Ogam line from the small to the broad end of the stone, changing its position, that the process may be from left to right. In this neither of the letters F or N occurs, and therefore it admits of no farther readings. The whole process is laid before the reader's eyes in the annexed drawing of the stones; but for the rules of decyphering he is referred to Colonel Vallancey's Irish grammar.

Fig. 1 and 2.

Fig. 2. By reading the decyphering marked thus  $\odot$ , twice forward, (commuting the letters F and N) and as often backward, (commuting the letters F and N as before,) the four first readings are found.

And by reading the decyphering forward, which is thus marked \*, the fifth and last reading may be also discovered; but as in this neither of the letters F or N occurs, it admits of no further readings; for in such case there would be three other possibilities, as in the former decyphering. Where, *Note*, that the letters F and N are marked with ( $\times \times \times$ ) crosses, that the reader may observe those to be the commutables.

Let any other besides these five ways be tried, and it will turn to no effect, which affords a proof that those found by this mode of decyphering are the only true readings, for not a word of common sense or perfect language can be otherwise collected.

By

By the word sacred, in the translation of this antient epitaph, is supposed to be meant the order of the Druids: in the original it is uaf, of which the uaemh and uaoimh of the moderns are but various writings, all signifying the same thing, viz. sacred, heavenly, blessed, &c. And from this circumstance we are led to understand that the Druids paid the last honours to the remains of the warlike Conan, by celebrating his funeral obsequies according to the usual solemnity with which the heroes of antiquity were always interred, such as is set forth in the fragment of the poem before recited; and this they were not denied even by those who in their life-time might have been their professed mortal enemies.

THE word which I translate hieroglyphic is in the original Oca, of which the Ogam of the moderns too is but a various writing. This is a convincing proof that this occult character was different from that which was used in common; for to what other purpose would it be thus so particularly specified? I translate it hieroglyphic, only because it was the peculiar character of the Druids, in which they concealed all their mysteries. This is verified by the concurrent testimonies both of the traditions of the antients, and of the simple and undisguised narratives of our authentic records, which bear not the most distant appearance of deception, but mention it as a plain matter of fact. Many forms of this character are still preserved in a manuscript of very high antiquity yet extant, called the book of Ballymote; and Sir James Ware, a gentleman whose candour cannot be easily suspected, tells us, in his collections of the antiquities of this country, that he had in his possession an entire volume written in it; which monument I am very apprehensive has suffered

the same fate with many more of our antient authentic documents.

WHEN all Druidical rites were abolished by the introduction of Christianity into this kingdom, the chief bards and seanachies made the Ogam character a private property of their own; but to what use they applied it is not easy to determine. Wherever this character is to be met with in sepulchral inscriptions, it may be inferred, that such are the tombs of kings, princes or chieftains, who signalized themselves by their valour and warlike deeds, and were therefore thus honoured. In all other respects, obscurity, and to contain much within a narrow compass, was the purposed end and object of the Ogam; for, from the construction, it contains much within a small space, and is ultimately founded on an alphabet of different characters, which is evident even from the explication of the inscription before us, wherein the letters F and N, (which are severally represented by the characters  $\overline{\text{III}}$  or  $\overline{\text{TTTT}}$ ,) are commutable, a property which they have not in any other part of our language; and it is given them here probably to render the whole scheme more obscure, this commutation depending, as has been already observed, on the two different arrangements of the Irish alphabet: And thus it is left to the reader's choice to which of the two letters, F or N, he will apply either of the aforefaid marks; but the sense will always direct him to the proper mode of application.

THERE are three species of the Ogam handed down to us in the writings of the antients: the first is called Ogam Craebh, or the Ogam of Branches, from the similitude it bears to the branches  
of

of a tree, the one long line being considered as the stem; of this there are many forms, all of which however depend upon the same scale of decyphering, and of this species is the Mount-Callan inscription.

THE second species of the Ogam is called Ogam Coll, or the Ogam of C's; and the third is called Ogam Confain, or the Ogam of Consonants. Those two last were only temporary in their use, and their obscurity consisted in making use of C's in the one, and certain different consonants in the other, instead of the vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs of the language: but the first, that is, the Ogam of Branches, was the most permanent standard of this occult system, and probably by much the most antient. This word is spelt Ogam or Ogham, and is derived of Oc, Ogh, or Ogha, a circle; because its fundamental rules are given on five circles drawn at certain intervals within each other, of which the following is a diagram taken from the book of Ballymote.

Fig. 3.

AND as the lines of which it is composed evidently refer to an alphabet already existing, by this word (Ogam) in our language is understood an obscure character or an occult manner of writing.

THESE circumstances are sufficient to prove that we had letters independent of the Ogam; for it is after considerable advances in the cultivation of literature that those occult systems are contrived, in order to serve some private end which requires concealment.

WHEN.

WHEN I speak of occult systems of writing, I hope I shall not be so far misunderstood as to have it imagined that I confound them with primitive hieroglyphics, which I look upon to be the first steps made towards the invention of letters. I have already given my reason for calling the Irish Ogam by this name, and have also endeavoured to prove that it was not the primitive character used in this country, but an obscure one depending on a more commodious common alphabet. I humbly presume then, that this confirms the cultivation of literature in Ireland before the introduction of Christianity; for as the inscription on the Mount-Callan monument corresponds with the third century of our æra\*, I think no fair objection can be raised against our acquaintance with letters in this country at that period; but this is a subject which prejudice has so misrepresented, that I fear it would argue presumption in me to advance

\* The poem, intitled *Cath Gabhra*, is that which directs us in search of the Mount-Callan monument. It concludes with mentioning the death of Conan, in the manner before related (page 4) by the Fenii of Fin, meaning the Clan of Baifgin. The poem is brought in by way of episode in that called The Conversation of St. Patrick and Oisín, to shew the ill effects of civil contentions. But should it be asked why a poem of the eighth century should so particularly relate a fact so far back? I answer, that a poet may relate a matter of fact when it serves his purpose as well as a fiction; and many a fact of this kind was then known which is now buried in obscurity. Our poems point out many other monuments besides that on Mount-Callan, which might still be discovered, if proper search was made after them. This poem enables us to determine the date of the monument, which would otherwise be very difficult, as nothing to that end is found in the inscription. The death of Conan is expressly said to have happened the year before the battle of Gabhra was fought, and therefore in the year 295, consequently the stone must have been inscribed 1490 years ago, though from its hard texture the inscription is still perfectly legible.

any

any thing more concerning it; it requires the exertion of far greater abilities than I can pretend to: however, I beg leave to add here what Mr. O'Connor, an antiquarian of credit, and a member of your academy, has been pleased to communicate to me, in a letter he was good enough to honour me with on that head.

“ THAT the Milesian Family,” says he, “ imported letters  
“ into Ireland, and that their ancestors learned them from the  
“ Phœnicians, I am certain; and Mr. Burton judged well in  
“ averring, that our earliest scribes wrote from the right hand to  
“ the left; but they changed to the more commodious manner  
“ of writing from the left to the right, and laid aside the uncouth  
“ crooked characters of the Phœnicians, when the beautiful Greek  
“ and Roman characters were made known here in the fourth  
“ and fifth centuries.”

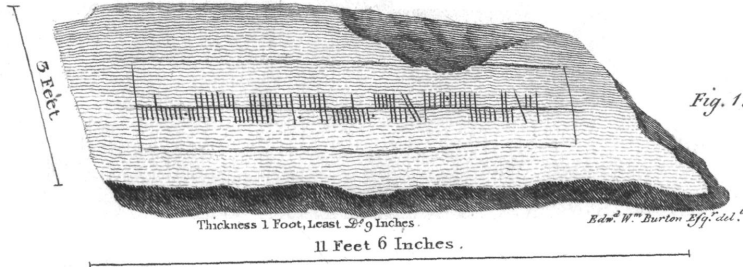
INDEED the very alphabet of the Irish, from the number of letters it consists of (being only seventeen) would be sufficient to prove that it did not derive its origin from the Romans, or any other of our neighbouring nations; and although all their letters have been since well known to us, yet such is the texture of the Irish language, that we have found no occasion to make use of them, our antient alphabet still continuing to serve every purpose, so that we have adopted nothing of theirs but the arrangement: consequently, (as Mr. O'Connor says in another part of his letter to me,) “ Our first missionaries of the gospel  
“ were saved the slavish task of alphabet-teachers, for they met  
“ with a lettered people, whose philosophy and manners prepared  
“ them

“ them for a more rapid progress of the gospel in this remote part  
 “ of Europe than in any other that we read of.”

OF the existence of the Ogam then, I hope all doubts are done away; and as to my explication of the inscription on the Mount-Callan monument, I have adhered with all the strictness I possibly could to the true rules of decyphering, with which I have laboured to be pretty well acquainted, and therefore my explication will appear plain to such as will chuse to take the same trouble. 'Till this is done, all the objection I can meet with must appear as the production of conjecture in opposition to matter of fact; indeed the discovery of the true sense of this inscription is principally owing to the ingenious thought of Mr. Burton, with respect to the reading backward; which, whether it affects the antient literary system of this country in general, or not, at least was instrumental in exciting me to the search, which I should otherwise have been apt to neglect; for, finding one sensible reading, it is probable I should not have thought of tracing it farther than the rules in our grammars might direct, and those I find are totally insufficient.



# The SEPULCHRAL STONE of CONAN.



## THE INSCRIPTION DECYPHERED.

